



# House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

**JIM TURNER, Ranking Member**

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## **WE ARE NOT AS SAFE AS WE NEED TO BE**

*At a hearing today before the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, "The Department of Homeland Security's Proposed Fiscal Year 2005 Budget," with Secretary Tom Ridge, Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member, made the following statement.*

Thank you for being here with us today Secretary Ridge and for your service to the country. You have a daunting set of responsibilities. I know that I speak for everyone on our committee when I say how grateful we are for your dedication to addressing the great challenges that face our nation.

You have also assembled a very skilled leadership team that is working tremendously hard to bring the Department up to speed. Admiral Loy appeared before our committee last week for the first time. We look forward to continuing to work with him and the Under Secretaries who will be appearing before us in coming weeks. We are grateful for their dedication.

And Mr. Secretary, I also want to extend my praise to the people who serve with great skill, dedication, and patriotism in the Department of Homeland Security.

Our customs and immigration inspectors, the screeners at the airports, the intelligence analysts, the coast guardsmen and many others -- they are the front line troops in this war on terror that we are fighting.

They are at their posts every day protecting the America. It is often not glamorous work, and it is sometimes dangerous. But it is very necessary and greatly appreciated by the American people.

We are here today, a few weeks shy of the one-year anniversary of the date that 22 agencies were merged to form the Department of Homeland Security. As the budget submitted last week reflects, the Department is maturing. The organizational structure is becoming clearer. The Department has performance goals and programs dedicated to achieving those goals. And many of the initiatives launched over the past year are beginning to take root. They are laying a foundation for greater security in this country. Progress is being made and the Department's

leadership deserves great credit for this.

The question we need to ask, however, is not whether we are safer now than we were on 9/11. The key question is whether we are as safe as we need to be. The answer is, unfortunately, that we are not. America continues to face serious security gaps. It doesn't matter what area you consider: our ports, our land borders, bioterrorism preparedness, chemical plants -- all the way down the line -- the security gaps are substantial and open to exploitation by terrorists.

Let me provide just a few examples:

\*\* Two and a half years after 9/11, we still do not have a functional, comprehensive terrorist watch list. This means people are boarding planes or entering our borders without being checked against the government's entire list of known terrorists. The FBI is now working hard to solve this problem, but it has a long way to go. You testified earlier this week that the job will be done by the end of summer; it should have been completed years ago.

\*\* The ricin attack on the Senate last week reminds us that bioterrorism is still a dangerous threat.

Yet, we are not as prepared as we need to be for a bioterror attack. Last year the Administration set out to vaccinate 500,000 emergency workers and 10 million citizens for smallpox to increase our ability to respond to an attack. But only 39,000 emergency workers are currently vaccinated across the nation. Only 17 people are vaccinated in the entire state of Nevada; 71 in Chicago, and 342 in New York. That is a total of one vaccinated emergency worker for every 30,000 people living in those areas.

\*\* 20 million cargo containers come into United States through our seaports and land borders and then travel by truck and rail right through our communities. But we do not screen all these cargo containers to ensure that they are not carrying radiological materials that could be used for a dirty bomb or a nuclear weapon. Installation of "radiation portals" would allow us to screen 100 percent of the cargo containers that enter the country without slowing commerce. Last year Congress provided funding to install portals at every major seaport, but the job is not getting done. Only one seaport in America has this technology fully installed. Not a single port of entry on the southern border has radiation portals. Not a single rail hub has them either.

\*\* Our communities all across America still lack the equipment, training, and personnel needed to respond to acts of terrorism. While large resource increases have gone to our nation's first responders in recent years, we still lack a national goal of what more needs to be done. As you know, some outside experts have estimated that close to \$100 billion is needed to ensure that all of our citizens are fully protected. Yet funding proposed for first responders is 18 percent below the amount provided last year.

Mr. Secretary, without any disparagement of your efforts and honorable intent, we are not moving fast enough and strong enough to close these security gaps in light of the threats we face.

The budget increase that the Department is receiving this year is important and necessary.

But we need to put that figure in perspective.

Despite common perception, we have not restructured our national budget to protect the homeland. Since 9/11, we have increased discretionary spending on the agencies that now make up the Department of Homeland Security by about \$12 billion. During that same period, our defense budget has increased by \$135 billion. The budget increase for this year in homeland security is about the cost of one month of the Iraq occupation. Another way to look at it is that we could run the entire Department of Homeland Security for three years with the “estimating error” the Administration made on the Medicare bill passed last year.

Thus, the limitations imposed on our homeland security efforts is a direct function of choices that this Administration has made. If we wanted to take faster and stronger action to close the security gaps we face, we could. It is a matter of priorities. And, Mr. Secretary, history has shown in the past that if the President requests support in the name of national security, the Congress never fails to respond.

Moreover, Mr. Secretary, many of us are concerned that our homeland security efforts lack the sense of urgency that the task demands.

Again, a couple of examples:

\*\* A key component of a robust and effective homeland security strategy is a comprehensive threat and vulnerability assessment to help set priorities and ensure that scarce resources are directed where they are needed the most. This has not been done.

\*\* By law, the Department of Health and Human Services was supposed to develop a coordinated strategy to prepare for and respond to a bioterror attack. It is eight months late and counting.

\*\* Lack of information sharing between federal agencies and between the federal government and local law officials has been identified as a key cause of 9/11. While new organizations have been formed to address this problem, every major study, including the recent Markle Foundation Report, have found that the federal government has not taken the steps necessary to create a decentralized, coordinated information network. State and local officials complain bitterly that they do not receive useful information from the federal government.

In summary, Mr. Secretary: Is progress being made? Surely. Are we safer today than we once were? Yes. But it is clear to me that we are not as safe as we need to be.

Mr. Secretary, the American people do not hear the daily threat reports that come to the constant attention of intelligence officials. If they did, the American people would be demanding that we move faster and stronger in protecting against the threats we face. It is our responsibility to recapture the urgency, the focus, and the sense of purpose that all Americans felt after September 11.

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